

To Teachers Everywhere:

To begin I would like to thank you - my teacher friends and colleagues. I spent months feeling almost apologetic because the White House was going to spend time honoring me, a teacher. I was certain there were more important visitors with which the Federal Government could choose to correspond. I am happy to tell you, I have come to realize that we as teachers not only deserve, but have essential insight into this nation, that must be shared with everyone in a decision making capacity. Teachers build the builders. WE create the business giants, the successful doctors, the humanitarian workers and even the President of the United States. So friends and colleagues, I was thinking of us, of you, during my week in Washington DC and I have concluded that WE are all White House worthy - WE are the perfect guests because what WE do is so very important. Thank you and know that without you, my job would be infinitely less enjoyable!

So here is what happened when I met the President:

We were standing in line tallest to shortest making me one of the last of 53 to meet President Obama. As my turn approached, my name was announced, "Mr. President, Jamie Manker representing Missouri." The President and I shook hands and I said my practiced line, "I was at your 1st inauguration." He laughed and made a joke about it being cold that day. It was really cold and I laughed (which meant I finally took a breath for the first time in about 15 seconds)! I then got out my other practiced phrase, something along the lines of – "I had students with me at the inauguration and it was wonderful for them to see government in action." At the same time the president was turning us toward the camera for our formal picture. I put my arm around his back and honestly I did wince a little just because I wasn't sure if this was going to be cool with the secret service but I figured it was my one chance. I had my arm around the President and tried to remember to smile for the camera. After the snap of the photo, we shook hands a last time and The President looked down (he is quite a bit taller than me) and said. "I am proud of you for what you do." At the same moment the 2nd announcement was made into the audience of the East Room, "Jamie Manker representing the state of Missouri." The president had just told me he was proud of my work and I, as the representative of all Missouri teachers, was walking into the East Room surrounded by press, family, and other Teachers of the Year. It was such a humbling overwhelming feeling that I started to cry as I walked on to the stage. Once on stage though, I quickly realized being short meant I would be just behind the President and I was determined not to have an ugly crying face while on TV so I quickly pulled it together and was able to focus and listen to the President as he encourage the audience to thank a teacher. Like President Obama, I want to encourage each of you to take a moment to thank a teacher who has made a difference in your life.

Thank you teachers and if you know a teacher doing good work - thank them! You can use #ThankATeacher on twitter.

Jamie